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The Palimpsest

Volume 11 | Number 8

Article 4

8-1-1930

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Recommended Citation

Swisher, J A. "Billy Sunday." *The Palimpsest* 11 (1930), 343-354.
Available at: https://ir.uiowa.edu/palimpsest/vol11/iss8/4

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Billy Sunday

The Detroit Tigers and the Chicago White Sox were playing neck and neck for the championship of the National League. Mike Kelly was catching and John G. Clarkson was pitching for the White Sox. Two men were out and two were on bases when Charley Bennett, catcher for the Tigers, came to bat. Clarkson threw three balls and two strikes. Then came the crucial moment of the game. All eyes were fixed on the White Sox pitcher. He swung to throw an upward curve, which he hoped would be a third strike. His foot slipped. The ball went low instead of high. Bennett swung. A terrific blow sent the ball out, out far beyond the limits of the diamond.

The right fielder turned and ran to the rear. He called for the crowd to disperse, then hurdled a bench, looked at the ball, and ran again. In a supreme effort to win the game, he made a final leap and shoved out his left hand. The ball hit his glove and stuck, but the fielder plunged headlong. Over and over he turned, then sprang to his feet still holding the ball. The crowd, wild with enthusiasm, cheered to an echo. Billy Sunday, the world's champion base runner and right fielder, had saved the day for the White Sox.

William Ashley Sunday was the son of a soldier and a patriot. Through the exigencies of war he

was denied the privilege of ever looking upon the face of his father. He was born in a log cabin near Ames, on November 19, 1862, three months after his father — William Sunday, aged 34 — had enlisted as a private in Company E, Twenty-third Iowa Volunteer Infantry. A month after the boy's birth his father died in camp at Patterson, Missouri. The mother, a devout Christian, was called upon to take up the heaviest of all burdens of patriotism — the rearing of an orphan family in a home of dire poverty and want.

For a time Mrs. Sunday, aided by her father, Squire Corey, was able to keep her little family together under the roof of the two-roomed log cabin which they called home. The time came, however, when this task became too burdensome, and the three Sunday boys, Roy, Edward, and William, became unwitting participants in another aspect of war. When Billy was twelve years old he and Edward were sent to the Soldiers' Orphanage at Glenwood. Later they were transferred to the Davenport Orphanage. Thus for two years Billy Sunday was an orphan among orphans, a recipient of State aid, yet not for a moment a public charge. For the Commonwealth of Iowa was, in a small measure, but tendering to him the consolation which may be found in the gratitude of the Republic for the preservation of which his father had died.

Sunday, commenting upon his early life in Iowa, once said: "I was bred and born (not in old Ken-

tucky, although my grandfather was a Kentuckian), but in old Iowa. I am a rube of the rubes. I am a hayseed of the hayseeds, and the malodors of the barnyard are on me yet, and it beats Pinaud and Colgate, too. I have greased my hair with goose grease and blacked my boots with stove blacking. I have wiped my old proboscis with a gunny-sack towel; I have drunk coffee out of my saucer and I have eaten with my knife; I have said 'done it', when I should have said 'did it', and I 'have saw' when I should 'have seen', and I expect to go to Heaven just the same. I have crept and crawled out from the university of poverty and hard knocks, and have taken post graduate courses.''

Billy Sunday was a champion sprinter. Even as a boy he won a prize of three dollars in a foot race at a Fourth of July celebration at Ames. A few years later he could run a hundred yards from a standing start in ten seconds flat. And his speed counted on the baseball diamond. He was the first man to circle the bases in fourteen seconds.

When he left the Davenport Orphanage he was apprenticed to Senator John Scott of Nevada, Iowa, with whom he lived and did chores for his board. He attended the Nevada high school, graduating in the class of 1881. There he soon came to be a local baseball celebrity, noted for his agility and dexterity on the diamond. In 1883 in a game at Marshalltown his phenomenal base-running was observed by ''Pop'' Anson, famous leader of the Chicago White

Sox. A bargain was struck between Sunday and Anson, and Billy went directly to Chicago where for five years he played with the White Sox. Later he played with the Pittsburgh and Philadelphia teams. He is remembered to this day by baseball fans as one of the fastest players that the greatest of all American sports ever produced.

During the decades which have passed since Sunday left Nevada and Marshalltown he has never ceased to be the center of public interest. The story of his transformation from a baseball celebrity to the greatest evangelist of modern times is a tale of human interest. He preaches now as he played then, with all the enthusiasm and agility of an accomplished athlete.

As he hurdled a bench in the game with Detroit, so he hurdles a chair on the platform, or bounds to a table to emphasize his declaration that sin is a curse, and that "you can't shine for God on Sunday, and then be a London fog on Monday". As in the heyday of his baseball career he circled the bases in fourteen seconds, so in later years he covers the four corners of his platform with almost equal celerity. "At one moment he is at one end of his long platform and before you become used to seeing him there he is at the other, and then quicker than thought he bounds back to the center."

Mr. Sunday's entrance into the work of an evangelist was not the culmination of a definite plan on his part. It was rather the result of a happy com-

bination of circumstances. One who knew him as an athlete in the early eighties would not have suspected his becoming an evangelist a decade later. Indeed, if such a career had been suggested, he himself would have been the most surprised of all.

Social life in Chicago during the eighties was not without its pitfalls, and professional athletes were not immune from the influences of the saloon and the cabaret. Billy Sunday was no exception to the rule. Famous throughout the baseball world for his skill and sportsmanship on the diamond, he was entertained and lionized socially. He was not averse to taking a social drink, and had acquired an appetite for alcoholic beverages.

In the fall of 1887, however, Sunday had an experience which made him forever unalterably opposed to the use of alcohol, and an arch-enemy of the liquor traffic. It was Sunday afternoon. Billy and five of his illustrious baseball companions had visited a saloon on Van Buren Street and imbibed freely. Toward evening they strayed from the saloon and sat for a time on the curbstone. Strains of music were heard in the distance. A company of men and women from the Pacific Garden Rescue Mission were playing and singing gospel hymns. Sunday was impressed with the music. It brought to his mind the scenes of childhood. He recalled those trying reconstruction days when he lived in a two-room log cabin out in Iowa. His mother, "he needs must think of her once more", and of the

songs she used to sing. Then they sang one of her favorites:

> When peace like a river attendeth my way
> When sorrows like sea billows roll,
> Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say
> It is well, it is well with my soul.

Sunday arose from his seat on the curbstone, left his companions, followed the retreating strains of music to the Pacific Garden Mission, and resolved to lead a new life. To use a phrase made familiar by him in later years, he "hit the sawdust trail".

After Sunday was converted he continued to play professional baseball, but always with the thought that he should be devoting his time to some phase of religious work. This situation continued until the spring of 1891, when he rejected an offer of five hundred dollars a month in a baseball contract to accept less than one-sixth that amount, $83.33 per month, as assistant secretary in the Chicago Y. M. C. A.

After three years of Y. M. C. A. work, Sunday entered professional evangelistic work in association with Rev. J. Wilbur Chapman, a well-known Presbyterian evangelist. Sunday's work was not that of a preacher or a public speaker. Instead, he was advance agent and "general roustabout for the evangelist". He arranged for meetings, organized choirs, and helped local committees provide advertising. He sold song books, helped take up the col-

lection, and occasionally when necessity demanded he assumed the rôle of speaker.

Suddenly during the holidays in 1895 Sunday received a telegram from Chapman saying that he had decided to return to his pastorate at the Bethany Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, and that he would discontinue his evangelistic work. Sunday was thus thrown out of a job. He had a wife and two children to support. He could not go back into baseball. He had given up his job in the Y. M. C. A. It was difficult to know what was best to do.

Even in the face of these exigencies, however, Sunday was not without hope. He believed that there was a Divinity shaping his course, and that the Lord would provide ways and means. His faith in this regard was well founded, for he soon found himself playing the rôle of an independent, full-fledged evangelist.

In referring to this incident later in life, he spoke of having lost his job, and then said. "I laid it before the Lord, and in a short while there came a telegram from a little town named Garner, out in Iowa, asking me to come out and conduct some meetings. I didn't know anybody out there, and I don't know yet why they ever asked me to hold meetings. But I went."

As a native son of Iowa, who had experienced the hardships and privations of pioneer days, as an inmate of two Iowa Soldiers' Orphanages, and as a local baseball celebrity at Nevada and Marshall-

town, Sunday cherished fond memories of the Hawkeye State. It is significant that his career as an independent evangelist, likewise, had its beginning, and indeed considerable development in Iowa.

When Billy Sunday went to Garner in 1896 he had no special aids, and had only eight sermons prepared. His equipment consisted chiefly of his personality and his zeal and enthusiasm for the work at hand. So well did he acquit himself, however, that he did not need to seek other appointments. Neighboring communities, hearing of his success, made attractive bids for his services, and his problem of unemployment was solved. During the decade which followed, he experienced a wonderful growth and development. He prepared and delivered hundreds of sermons, organized a group of workers, developed a unique and dramatic method of presentation, and won for himself an enviable reputation as a speaker and evangelist.

No city could induce him to hold meetings unless an invitation were presented, signed by the ministers of all the evangelical churches and accompanied by an agreement to coöperate in making the meetings successful. Moreover, an evangelistic association was usually formed to erect a large tabernacle in which to hold the meetings. Sunday specifically refused to guarantee that the collections would be sufficient to repay the money advanced for this purpose, but there was usually no difficulty in that.

During these early years of his evangelistic ca-

reer, Sunday visited scores of cities and towns throughout the Middle West, winning thousands of converts. In 1907 he held a series of meetings at Fairfield. His corps of helpers at that time consisted of Francis E. Miller, bible-class teacher; Fred R. Seibert, general utility man, Rev. T. E. Honeywell, associate evangelist; Mr. and Mrs. F. G. Fischer, musicians; and, most important of all, "Ma" Sunday — as Mrs. Sunday is familiary known — financial secretary and business manager for the group. In addition to these special helpers, committees of members of all the churches were organized to act as ushers, as individual workers, and as members of the choir.

When Sunday arrived at Fairfield he visited the stores and business houses to meet the townsfolk, and made a very favorable impression on those he met. At the first meeting, however, the congregation "hardly filled the hall". But Sunday was soon able to stimulate interest by his characteristic acrobatic tactics. "Becoming over-warm, he ripped off his coat then his waistcoat and then his tie and collar." Night after night for weeks dramatic methods were used and direct appeals made for sinners to repent.

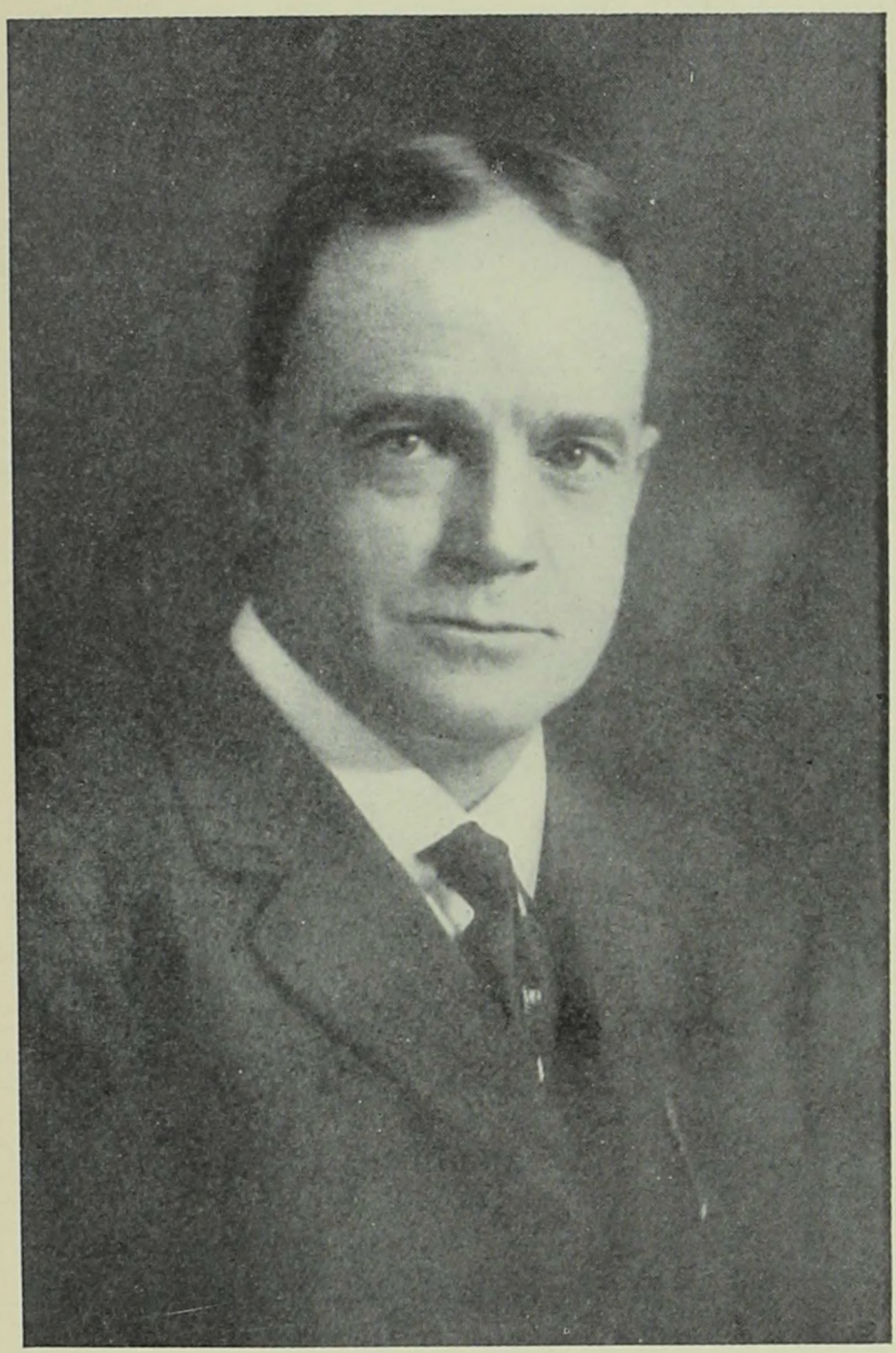
On the last night of the series Sunday chose for his text "but you say tomorrow", and made a strong appeal against procrastination. "To-night", he said, "when the last song is sung, the last prayer said and we have all passed out into the night and Fred has switched off the lights and the place is dark

—your chance sinner will be gone. . . . My God, my friend, if the Lord would only draw back the veil which is between you and your coffin, you would leap back in horror to find it so near that you could reach out and touch it. But you say to-morrow.''

When Sunday left Fairfield he reported eleven hundred and eighteen converts. The tabernacle which he had built at a cost of thirty-two hundred dollars was paid for, and he was given an offering of more than thirty-six hundred dollars.

In 1914 he held a series of meetings in Des Moines which resulted in securing more than ten thousand converts. His success as an evangelist was at that time recognized everywhere. His meetings, however, had centered in the middle western States, and it was commonly believed that he would be less successful in conservative New England and the eastern States.

In 1915, however, he went to Philadelphia, where for seventy-eight days he preached two sermons a day to fifteen thousand people. The result was phenomenal — surpassing all former records — with more than forty-one thousand converts. In point of numbers, however, as well as in many other respects, Billy Sunday's most notable campaign was held in Boston during the winter of 1916. There the ''trail-hitters'' numbered 63,716, over twenty thousand more than the number of converts at Philadelphia. In eighteen eastern cities, including Pittsburgh, Columbus, and Toledo, he won a total of more than one



WILLIAM ASHLEY SUNDAY

hundred and sixty-seven thousand converts, while he and his helpers received personal contributions in excess of $267,000.

From the time of his conversion to the present, Sunday has been a bitter foe of intemperance. Next to his interest in preaching the gospel, and, indeed, closely associated with it has been his attack on the liquor traffic, which he declares he will continue to fight "till hell freezes over". During the years prior to the passage of the Eighteenth Amendment he was a most aggressive enemy of the open saloon. In Muscatine, Ottumwa, Marshalltown, Linwood, Centerville, and other Iowa towns the saloons were voted out largely as a result of his activities. In Illinois the saloons were voted out of thirteen out fifteen towns which he visited, and in West Virginia the temperance forces utilized his services in a State-wide whirlwind campaign against the saloon.

The saloon, he declares, was a coward, a robber, and a thief. "It hides itself behind stained-glass doors and opaque windows, and sneaks its customers in at a blind door, and it keeps a sentinel to guard the door from the officers of the law, and it marks its ware with false bills-of-lading, and offers to ship green goods to you and marks them with the name of some wholesome articles of food so people won't know what is being sent to you. . . . It fights under cover of darkness and assassinates the characters that it cannot damn, and it lies about you. It attacks defenseless womanhood and childhood. The

saloon is a coward. It is a thief; it is not an ordinary court offender that steals your money, but it robs you of manhood and leaves you in rags and takes away your friends, and it robs your family. It impoverishes your children and it brings insanity and suicide. It will take the shirt off your back and it will steal the coffin from a dead child and yank the last crust of bread out of the hand of the starving child; it will take the last bucket of coal out of your cellar, and the last cent out of your pocket, and will send you home bleary-eyed and staggering to your wife and children. . . . It is the dirtiest, most low-down, damnable business that ever crawled out of the pit of hell. It is a sneak, and a thief and a coward.''

Unique, interesting, dramatic, Billy Sunday is recognized as a most remarkable speaker and evangelist. Enthusiastic and impressive, he wins men by the sheer force of his personality. There are, indeed, those who criticize his antics and condemn his methods, but there are few who deny that he gets results. He preaches as if he were at bat in the last inning of a championship game with the bases full and two men out. He is sometimes criticized for his grandstand plays, but in evangelistic work as in his baseball career he has always demonstrated his ability to win.

J. A. Swisher